

Highlights

623 S Mesa Dr, Mesa Arizona



Atmosphere Architects presents Highlights, an infill project located along Mesa Dr, south of downtown. The project looks to turn the currently vacant lot on which it is situated into a multifamily development that is appropriate for this corridor. The project will take advantage of already-in-place infrastructure, providing additional system users without additional improvement outlays.

Highlights is made up of 3-story attached townhomes with attached garages. The narrow site along with a number of standard regulations provide challenges to creating a site plan for the development that faces and engages with the street. With this in mind, we used the design of the buildings to address this challenge. On the facades, there are angled edges highlighted in bright colors inspired by the nearby Mesa Urban Garden. While the buildings themselves are primarily oriented in the cardinal directions, the angled edges give an illusion of width and will engage passersby at various moments.

Another feature of the project is the amenity area that provides a landscape oasis. It is inspired by the Underwood Family Sonoran Landscape Laboratory found on UofA campus. There, HVAC condensate and rainwater are redirected to an above ground retention area that also provides seating space. The retention has different landscape character areas at different depths. The water sequentially fills each basin until finally; it fills the seating area too (see photos below). We are designing the project's amenity area to work similarly.



Surrounding Zoning



The project's .57-acre parcel has low intensity commercial buildings to the north (NC), a large multifamily development (RM-4) to the south, and low density multifamily (RM-2) to the east and west. The parcel itself is zoned RM-2. We are seeking a rezone to RM-4 BIZ. With the size of the parcel being 2-3x larger than similarly zoned nearby parcels and its position along the Mesa Dr. arterial near downtown, the density allowed by the RM-4 zoning feels more suitable.

Highlights consists of 15 3-story 2-bedroom units. All units will have attached 2-car garages at the Mesa required dimensions of 22' x 20'. Visitor parking will also be included.

Due to the parcel's narrow dimensions along with the sizeable requirements of solid waste and transportation, we are seeking a number of BIZ deviations in order to realize this project.



BIZ Overlay District Approval Criteria 1 and 2.

1. Provide distinctive, superior quality designs. (11-31-32)

a. 11-31-32

A. **Holistic Approach to Project Design.** *Varied, high-quality, regionally appropriate building materials, used in distinctive building forms, building massing and detailing that result in a note-worthy example of holistic site design, architecture, landscaping and signage; and*

The project design features passive cooling principles in the building orientation, recessed balconies, and the use of white stucco on the facades providing regionally appropriate materials and forms.

While the site is narrow, the project engages the street by facing as many units as possible towards it. The angled areas of the wall, highlit in various colors inspired by the Mesa Urban Garden, were designed with the site's narrowness specifically in mind. The angled edges give an illusion of width and will engage passersby at various moments providing distinctive detailing for the project

The landscape and amenity design highlight the use of water by reusing rainwater and HVAC condensate. This minimizes the amount of potable water needed to support the landscaping and causes the landscaping to change with the seasons, connecting residents with their environment to provide holistic site design and landscaping. The project also takes advantage of existing infrastructure as the city grows. See 2.a below.

B. **Responsive Approach to Site and Sub-Area Context.** *Architectural and landscape architecture details and features that reflect the character defined in Sub-Area Plans or Character Area Design Guidelines, that are harmonious with adjacent development patterns, integrate with the physical conditions of the immediate site, and create a unique sense of place; and*

Project design has angled planes of various colors. These angles can create an appearance of engaging the street beyond the site frontage and can give a dynamic visual for passersby. The colors were chosen to for their similarity to colors often used in south-central Mesa like the Fiesta district and Mesa Urban Gardens.

C. **Sustainable Design.** *Site design, architecture and landscaping features that address the local climate to reduce summer sun penetration and provide summer sunshade protection for pedestrians, promote energy and water conservation, promote the preservation or creation of open space, provide for and encourage the use of multiple modes of transportation, utilize existing infrastructure, and create the opportunity for social interaction; and*

The orientation of the buildings is primarily East-West as is appropriate for our local climate. The buildings feature recessed balconies to provide summer sunshade protection while still benefiting from natural light.

The proposed amenity area will use rainwater and HVAC condensate in order to conserve water. Due to its nature as an infill project, the development utilizes existing infrastructure and is near public transportation options.

- D. Exceeds Standards.** *Provision of details and features that exceed the criteria and standards specified in Sections 11-5-3, 11-5-5, 11-6-43, 11-6-4 (AS applicable), 11-7-3, 11-8-5, 11-8-6 and Chapters 30 through 34, where applicable; and*

By modifying Base Zone standards, the design for the project finds a balance between the many requirements of the MZO and other city departments in order to provide a development that is appropriate for an urban infill development near the city center with access to existing utility and transportation infrastructure. The open space requirements are exceeded in this site layout.

- E. Great Public Spaces.** *Details and features that create attractive, comfortable environments for pedestrians; ensure safe, useful and well-integrated open or public spaces; and include high quality amenities.*

Having a building facing the street puts additional eyes on it for a safer pedestrian environment.

Despite a tight site, the landscape and amenity design make the most of the available area by integrating retention into the amenity area and reusing HVAC condensate and rainwater to promote a lush landscape that will change with the seasons and connect residents with the environment. The rain garden is a feature that will be unique to the project. In addition to the main amenity area, another area is included on the north side of the property with shading, tables and seating. It is not included in the open area calcs, but is included to provide additional options for outdoor use by residents.

2. Address Environmental performance standards outlined below:

- a. Site selection criteria. Sites shall meet one or more of the following criteria.*
- i. Redevelop and rehabilitate economically distressed properties (particularly greyfield sites), damaged sites or environmentally contaminated 'brownfield' sites.*

Project is a development of a vacant property.

- ii. Utilize areas with existing utility and transportation infrastructure and existing community services. This criterion is preferred for higher density and higher intensity development, when feasible.*

The site has existing utility and transportation infrastructure.

- iii. Utilize locations within ½ mile of a planned light rail line or ¼ mile from an existing or planned bus stop. This criterion is preferred for higher density and higher intensity development, when feasible.*

Site is within ¼ mile of existing bus stops.

- b. *Site design criteria. Designing the site to facilitate alternative modes of transportation and to reduce onsite environmental impacts.*
- i. *Provide safe and secure storage for bicycles. For commercial, employment or institutional projects, bicycle storage areas shall be within 200 yards of the building entrance, and shall have a designated and convenient pedestrian access route connecting the storage area to the building. For residential projects, safe and secure bicycle storage areas shall be provided on-site for a minimum 15% of the residents.*

Most bicycle parking will be accommodated in unit garages, but an additional 6 spaces have been added.

- ii. *Include priority location parking for low-emission vehicles in parking areas.*

Low-emission vehicles are provided priority parking in the attached private garages of the units. Four additional spaces are provided for visitor parking.

- iv. *Provide the number of parking spaces designed to serve a development site consistent with the number of spaces required to meet the minimum parking ratio. Parking spaces over the minimum number is discouraged.*

The minimum parking requirement of 2.1*15 is exceeded by two spaces.

- v. *For greenfield sites, protect or restore natural areas on site with native vegetation to encourage biodiversity and for enjoyment by people. For previously developed sites, restore areas with native or adapted vegetation to encourage biodiversity and for enjoyment by people. The size of the space should be appropriate for the size of the site and the activity level or use of the site.*

The site is currently vacant of structures and vegetation. The design of the project reuses the condensation from HVAC systems and rainwater runoff to sustain the landscaping which will be designed as recessed retention areas in a similar way to the Underwood Family Sonoran Landscape Laboratory on UofA campus does.

- vi. *Design the project to be energy efficient including, but not limited to, designed to reduce summer heat gain, reduce winter heat loss, utilize day lighting strategies and provide the opportunity for occupants to take advantage of renewable energy. The design also mitigates the effects of solar exposure for users and pedestrians. For purposes of this criterion, buildings that have efficient HVAC systems, incorporate passive solar heating, cooling and day lighting strategies within an efficient building envelope, as recommended by the Department of Energy's Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) section [...].*

The buildings are oriented to reduce eastern and western sun exposure. Providing recessed balconies further mitigates heat gain. Each unit is to be equipped with an efficient Heat Pump.

- d. *Utilize areas with existing utility and transportation infrastructure and existing community services. This criterion is preferred for higher density and higher intensity development, when feasible.*

Site is within ¼ mile of existing bus stops and existing utility infrastructure. Nearby there are schools, churches, shops, and grocery stores.

- e. *Redevelop and rehabilitate economically distressed properties (particularly greyfield sites), damaged sites or environmentally contaminated 'brownfield' sites.*

The project is a development on a vacant or 'greyfield' property.

- f. *Utilize locations within ½ mile of a planned light rail line or ¼ mile from an existing or planned bus stop. This criterion is preferred for higher density and higher intensity development, when feasible.*

Site is within ¼ mile of existing bus stops.

Highlights increases the amount of dwelling units in central Mesa. Our aim is to create a development that will both contribute to and benefit from the ongoing revitalization of downtown.

Zoning Requirements Table and BIZ deviations

As noted, we are seeking a rezoning to RM-4 PAD to bring an additional housing option to the Mesa's central area.

Standard	RM-4 Requirement	RM-4 PAD Provided	Deviation Rational Key
Max Lot Coverage	70% Max.	79%	1
Minimum Yards (ft.) Table)			
Front and Street-Facing Sides: 6 lane Arterial	30'	15' 10"	2
Min. Interior Side and Rear	Multiple story: 15' per story = 45'		
Interior Side		North: 3' 9" (Solid waste enclosure) 9'-9" (Building) South: 9'-2" (Building)	3
Rear		9'-0"	4
11-5-5.A Min. Separation Between Buildings on the same lot	3 STORY = 35'	24'-0"	5

11-5-5(B)(4)(f)(iii) Attached Garages	3	7	6
11-32-4(A) Setback of Cross Drive Aisles	50'	20'-10"	7
11-5-5(B)(5) Material Percentages	25% min/primary material	15%	8
11-33-3(B)(2)(a)(ii) Landscape Yards	15'	North: 3' 9" (Solid waste enclosure) 9'-9" (Building) Rear: 9'-0" South: 9'-2" (Building) 1'-10" (Pavement)	9

We offer the following rationales/supports for our specific BIZ requests (see Table for applicability)

1. By providing a development with the density appropriate for downtown, the maximum lot coverage has been exceeded. Despite this, the open space standards are exceeded, and a well-designed amenity space will be provided. See Superior Quality Design above.
2. By placing the building near the sidewalk, eyes are oriented towards the street, making a safer and more comfortable pedestrian environment along the public sidewalk per BIZ criteria 'Great Public Spaces'
3. The base standard for setbacks requiring 15' per floor leaves only 13' of usable space for a three-story building, which is an appropriate height for a building near the city center. Placing the buildings nearer to the property lines allows for a project that better fits the site context than the base zoning allows.
4. The rear setback is reduced, allowing the guest parking and amenity area to be conveniently located on the site. This setback reduction is precisely what allows the amenity space to conform to MZO common area width standards.
5. By reducing the building separation, the buildings are able to be placed close one another, deemphasizing the service aisle of garage doors while still conforming to MZO standards and giving sufficient area for landscaping to be placed along the pedestrian pathways.
6. Angled portions of walls highlighted with bold colors are placed along the garage facades in order to break up the continuity of the garages. Creating a break in the buildings would reduce the size of the amenity area.

The efficient use of space on this small site leads to a better and more livable design without the break in garage doors.

7. On this narrow site, it was a challenge to fit transportation and solid waste requirements while also ensuring that residents had common amenity areas. Even by coordinating with Solid Waste to reduce the amount of area used by solid waste vehicles, available area for visitor parking was still constrained. In order to provide additional visitor parking, it was located within the 50' setback. The first parking space is 20'-10" from the property line, but 49'-11" from the curb. Following this standard would reduce the amount of parking available, which is a concern that planning staff has brought up. The parking setback has been reduced so that additional parking could be provided.
8. The initial idea for the façade was to have angled pieces of various colors that would engage passersby beyond the frontage of the site. To make the angled portions stand out, they were contrasted with white stucco. The vertical siding was added for the sake of the 11-5-5(B)5. All but one façade has the required percentages of materials. The composition of the stucco and the siding has been done with the entirety of the unit in mind (3 dimensionally). Increasing the amount of siding would clutter the façade. The design is better for not complying with the 11-5-5(B)5.
9. The landscape setback has been reduced in order to conveniently locate the amenities and guest parking. Additional landscaping is provided in the amenity area where the plants are integrated with the retention for a unique space in this development.